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RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 1163
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1868
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 000939

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2026
TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KDEM ASEC KE
SUBJECT: MASKED GUNMEN STORM NEWSPAPER OFFICE

REF: A. NAIROBI 837

¶B. NAIROBI 661

Classified By: A/PolCouns L. Peterson for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: A March 2 assault on a leading daily newspaper in Kenya, undertaken with the assistance of the police, marks a new low in the Kibaki administration,s respect for the rule of law. The &Standard8, despite its occasional editorial lapses, offers Kenyan readers hard-hitting investigative reporting, sometimes coming close to the President and his inner circle. The &Standard,s8 editors may be about to learn that the cost of exposing official corruption in Kenya is significantly higher than they anticipated. End Summary.

¶12. (U) A group of masked gunmen, apparently accompanied by uniformed police officers, stormed the offices of Kenya,s &Standard8 newspaper and a sister TV station, KTN, in the early hours of March 2. The intruders damaged equipment, confiscated computers, and burned thousands of copies of the March 2 edition of the &Standard.8 KTN broadcasting was disrupted. Two staff members were taken into custody, but later released without charges.

¶13. (U) The Media Council, Foreign Correspondent,s Association (FCA), and the Standard Media Group each came out with their own statements over the course of the day condemning the government,s actions. The Standard Media Group (both the broadcasting and newspaper components) held a press conference this morning decrying the government,s actions against them and promising legal action. The Nation Group, the number one media group in Kenya, took the highly unusual step of issuing a midday special edition of the country,s leading newspaper, the Daily Nation, with the entire first three pages taken up with photos and stories on the destruction done. A statement issued by the Embassy is at para. 11. This statement received an extraordinary amount of media attention. Leading TV station &Nation8 read it on air word-for-word within five minutes of receiving it. This led to an avalanche of requests from local and international media (AP, Reuters) while we were still in the process of sending the statement out to them via our regular channels. Kenya,s Media Council and the Foreign Correspondent,s Association (FCA) looked to us for guidance and received our statement eagerly.

¶14. (C) Ambassador spoke in mid morning with &Standard8

Editor-in-Chief, Tom Mshindi, who said he believed some kind of special police unit was involved, possibly one not reporting directly to Police Commissioner Ali. He vowed to take the government to court. Our calls to Presidential Adviser Murage, Presidential Permanent Secretary Muthaura, Police Commissioner Ali, and Information Minister Kagwe have all gone unanswered. Aside from Kagwe disclaiming any knowledge of the incident, as of mid-day the GOK has issued no comment or statement.

¶5. (C) Events leading to the raid began February 25 when the &Standard8 reported that President Kibaki had held a secret meeting with opposition figure (and presidential

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hopeful) Kalonzo Musyoka. Although both men swiftly denied the story, the GOK used the &Standard,s8 blunder to go on the offensive. Information Minister Kagwe accused the &Standard8 of trying "to confuse Kenyans8 and warned that the government was increasingly concerned about &abuse of freedom of the press.⁸ Security Minister Michuki (Kagwe,s father-in-law), also warned the media of unspecified consequences. On February 27, Presidential spokesperson Mutua sent a remarkable letter to the &Standard8 in which he noted &the publication of the manufactured story is an abuse of the freedom of the press and is contrary to all local and international journalism principles and ethics. The story also sets a dangerous precedent whereby your paper might in future publish a fabricated story that would lead to a national crisis that threatens our national security and international integrity.⁸ Mutua,s letter then demanded that the Standard publish a front page retraction of the Kibaki-Musyoka story on February 28, and went on actually to dictate the general content and tone of the retraction demanded by the GOK. Mutua,s ultimatum appears to have received no answer.

¶6. (C) Also on February 28, two &Standard8 editors and a journalist responded to a police summons to record statements about the Kibaki-Musyoka story. They were immediately taken into custody where they remain, as yet uncharged.

¶7. (C) The Deputy Managing Editor of the rival &Daily Nation8 conveyed to IO his deep concerns about the raid and his and his staff,s safety. He reported that editors of the &Nation,8 informed of the &Standard8 raid then in progress, holed up in their headquarters overnight fearing they might be next.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: All Kenyans wish their media were more accurate. And few condone the unfortunately rather common practice of buying and planting stories in the papers. Yet the thuggery displayed by the Kibaki government in response to what was an essentially meaningless story is bound to be widely condemned across Kenya. As &an extrajudicial settling of scores⁸) in Tom Mshindi,s words) this commando-style attack by paramilitaries recalls and replicates the excesses of the Moi years. It is fortunate that no one was injured.

¶9. (C) The score the Kibaki government seeks to settle is most likely the &Standard,s8 penchant for hard hitting investigative reporting that often comes close to the President and his inner circle, especially on matters of corruption. It is that quality of reporting that sells newspapers and wins public respect in Kenya. The editors of the &Standard8 may be about to learn that the cost of exposing official corruption is a lot higher than they anticipated.

¶10. (C) While it is too early tell, we believe it is quite likely that the raid was ordered by security minister Michuki. Michuki has repeatedly demonstrated that he has little time for legal niceties and is ready, and indeed eager, to operate outside the law when politics so dictate. The re-politicization and de-professionalization of Kenya,s police and security services continue apace under his tutelage. End Comment.

¶11. (U) Begin text of mission press statement:

The United States Condemns Attacks on the Media in Kenya

The United States condemns the assault early this morning on the Standard Media Group. These acts of thuggery have no place in an open democratic society. We note that these attacks were preceded by threats directed against the Standard from representatives of the Kenyan Government.

We deplore the current campaign of vilification and harassment of selected media. Clearly, the intent is to intimidate journalists, restrict press freedom, and deny Kenyan citizens their right to information and opinion.

We call upon the Government of Kenya to disavow today's actions, identify and discipline those responsible, and cease efforts to intimidate the media. The Government must respect internationally accepted rules of freedom of the press and charge or release promptly those members of the Standard Media Group currently in detention.

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